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Cuban Independence

Speech of

Hon William L Greene

1898

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CUBAN INDEPENDENCE.

S P E E C H

OF

HON. WILLIAM L. GREENE,
OF NEBRASKA,

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

TUESDAY, APRIL 12, 1898.

WASHINGTON.
1898.

S P E E C H
O F
HON. WILLIAM L. GREENE.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, and having under consideration the bill (S. 924) to authorize the Washington and Glen Echo Railroad Company to obtain a right of way and construct tracks into the District of Columbia 600 feet—

Mr. GREENE said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: We have reached a critical point in the history of this nation. We have reached a point where partisanship should be forgotten. We have come to a place in the pathway of our nation's history where we ought to be American citizens and not partisans.

If I were consulting simply what is best for the party to which I belong, or what is best for the minority in this Chamber, I would want to see the majority delay. I would favor the continued suspense as to what shall be the outcome of the great question now uppermost in the minds of the people. I am devoted to the principles of the party to which I belong; devoted to them because I believe they are embedded in truth, because I believe they will make for the upbuilding of the American people.

But, Mr. Chairman, while I am devoted to the principles of the party to which I belong, I am, first and above all, an American citizen, and I seek first the welfare and glory of my country. I seek the honor of my country, the upbuilding of my country, and whatever I believe makes for this purpose, for its peace, its honor, and its permanent prosperity, I welcome, whether it comes from this or that or the other section of this Chamber, or any one of the political organizations into which it is divided.

While differing widely from my Republican friends upon economic questions, yet I trust and believe I shall never reach the point where I can not believe that Republicans are patriotic, as devoted to their country as I am. I, as a member of this House,

have no right to call in question the patriotism of this side or that side of the Chamber, and I conscientiously believe that there is as much genuine love of America and American institutions on the one side as upon the other.

It afforded me the greatest satisfaction a few weeks ago to see a unanimous vote by this House, and by the other end of this Capitol, turning over to the President of the United States \$50,000,000 to use as his judgment might dictate for the protection of American interests and the maintenance of American honor.

I have wished and still hope that we may arrive at a position in the crisis which now confronts us, and which we soon must meet and settle, where there will be no division; that we can arrive at such a solution of the question that we can say to the world that the American Congress is a unit; that we march forward in solid phalanx to uphold and defend our common country. But we must stop and consider what is presented to us—what we are asked to do, and the result of the step which we are about to take.

Now, there are a number of views in this Chamber. There are those who believe that we ought to declare open war with Spain. There are others who believe that we ought to recognize the independence of the Cuban Republic and stop there. There are others who believe that we ought to intervene in the Island of Cuba for the purpose of stopping hostilities. We ought, therefore, I repeat, as careful, conscientious men, to stop and consider what is presented and what will be the outcome of the adoption of either of these propositions.

It is not enough for us to shut our eyes and say that some good will come out of it, or that it is not probable that this thing or that thing will occur. I have long since learned, sir, that when we embark upon any issue, it is the part of wisdom to ask, What do we make possible by such a course? Not what will likely occur, not what will probably happen, but what may happen if we adopt that course, because we never can tell what the future will develop.

So, I beg of you to-day to consider well all the possibilities as well as the probabilities that surround either of the propositions which will soon be submitted for our consideration.

The President of the United States has sent us his message, and

I am not here to criticise it or review it in a partisan spirit. A large part of it is patriotic and statesmanlike and will receive the approval of the American people; but what do we have presented to us in it for our action?

What are we asked to do? We are simply asked to permit the President of the United States to intervene in the Island of Cuba, peaceably if he can, forcibly if he must. And what more? To restore order on the Island of Cuba and give the people a stable form of government. Is there a gentleman upon this floor who knows what kind of a government is proposed for Cuba? Is it to be a government by the people of Cuba and for the people of Cuba, or is it to be a stable government under the Spanish flag? Does any gentleman know? If he knows, he can look further into the future and can divine mysteries far beyond any capabilities that I possess.

But let us stop and ask, What does intervention in the Island of Cuba mean? If we simply intervene, we say, first, that we have no cause for war against Spain. We say that the children of the Spanish Government have become recreant and disobedient, and that the friendly power of Spain is unable to control those children and to restore peace in her territory, and we intervene for the purpose of settling it for them. That is all. Nothing more than that, nothing less than that. And here I will remark that if we have cause to intervene in Cuba to-day, the same cause has existed for two long, weary years.

Men and women have been starving. Babies have starved in their mother's arms. Sword and fire have devastated that island. Horrors beyond the power of human language to depict have existed there, and yet we have remained silent. What has arisen lately to demand the intervention of the United States? Nothing new. The same old story of atrocity and of Spanish brutality, the same old story of inhumanity and brutal force, of ignominious death and ruin, that for two years have confronted the American people.

I say that if we simply intervene we admit that Spain is a friendly power. We further admit that all Cubans are Spanish subjects. We say there is no government in Cuba that we can recognize except the Spanish Government. Simple intervention

is not a declaration of war. I want to ask this House, if we do intervene and Spain should elect not to treat our intervention as a cause for her making a declaration of war, then all Spanish subjects on that island must be pacified and pacified by us. Suppose that Spain, as I have said, refuses to regard our intervention as a cause of war and lays down her arms, ceases to fight, and says, "Why, I am ready to be pacified!"

Mr. SMITH of Kentucky. She has done that now.

Mr. GREENE. She has already done it. She has notified the people of the United States that she is ready to declare an armistice over the island now. In what position do we find ourselves when we enter the island and Spain agrees to stop? Will we not then have to turn against Gomez and his band of patriots? Suppose Gomez, with his band of 30,000 patriots, says: "For three years have we waged this war; for three years we have struggled and suffered to obtain our liberty. I am unwilling, to lay down my arms at this juncture. If we should enter into an armistice with Spain and lay down our arms indefinitely, the rainy season will pass by, the one in which Spain can not fight; the hour of our opportunity will have passed away; and I will not, therefore, lay down my arms. We will fight on for liberty."

I want to ask, gentlemen, what are we going to do about it? Spain is pacified. Spain has laid down her arms. Gomez says I will wage the warfare until liberty shall perch upon the Cuban banner. If we are simply going over there to pacify the island what is there left for us to do if what I have said should occur, except to turn our guns upon the Cuban patriots and compel them to lay down their arms?

What else could we do? They refuse to lay their guns down; they refuse to quit fighting. Spain agrees to stop. We are there to pacify. If we pacify them, that means we will pacify them with the sword unless we can do it by peaceable means. Is there a Representative upon this floor who would lift up his voice or give his vote to make it possible to turn American guns on brave Gomez and his 30,000 patriots?

What would be the condition of affairs in this country if we had gone there for the purpose of pacifying the Island of Cuba and American guns had been turned on Gomez? What would be the

effect of it? How would you feel confronting your constituents when you voted to make such a condition of affairs possible? Ah, but, say some gentlemen, I am not in favor of that. Such a contingency as that will never arise. No American will ever fire his gun in the direction of a Cuban patriot.

But I am talking about what may result. If Gomez will not lay down his arms, then we are either compelled to fight Gomez or vacate the island. Either one or the other. Now, that is what simple intervention may lead to. That is, at least, one of the possibilities. Are we ready to do that? Are we ready to make any such thing a possibility? I trust there is not one here who is ready to do it. After we get the island of Cuba pacified, I want to ask gentlemen, what does the President intend to do with it?

Mr. BRUCKER. Give it a carpet-bag government under quasi military rule.

Mr. GREENE. I am not discussing this in a partisan sense, but I fear that will be the result. Suppose we have got Spain to lay down her arms, and Gomez has laid down his, and we have a perfect state of tranquillity from one end of the island to the other. They are all pacified. Now, what are we going to do with the island? There is one of three things we can do. We can either pacify the island and turn it back to Spain, or can take it ourselves, or we can turn it over to the people of the island.

Now, which one are you going to do? Is there anything in the message of our President that gives us an intimation of what he intends to do with the island after it is pacified? Is there any gentleman on that side of the House who knows what he intends to do with it?

Mr. STEPHENS of Texas. How about HANNA?

Mr. GREENE. I was not going to allude to HANNA, but he may know. Is there an American citizen who would ever consent that we should turn the island back again to the Spanish Government? Would anybody tolerate it in this country? Are we to expend our money, take the chance of death from fever on the island to pacify the island, and then turn it back to the Spanish Government? I say such a thing would never be tolerated by the American people because it would be an outrage on the people of Cuba.

I want your careful attention just here. If Spain is a friendly power—and we admit her to be when we intervene and say we have no cause for war; we go to subdue her rebellious children—can we afford, as a Christian nation, to turn around and steal her island? Are you in favor of that? A friendly power—a power in which the President has expressed the greatest confidence as to its honesty and integrity. Well, you say, we are going to let the people put up a government for themselves.

Gentlemen, there are some questions confronting us just at this point that we ought to carefully and seriously consider. You must bear in mind that there are held by the people of foreign governments large sums of bonds issued by the Spanish Government and predicated largely upon the revenues which Spain derives from Cuba. If we go and take the Island of Cuba, admitting Spain to be a friendly power, and when we get it pacified we turn around and take that island away from the Spanish Government, what will be the attitude and right of the foreign powers whose citizens hold the obligations of Spain predicated upon the revenues of that island?

Do you not know that France, Germany, and England would step to the front and say to this country, "You can not steal the territory of a friendly power unless you make the obligations good?" Do you not know they would do it? Is there a man doubts it? I want to ask you, in all candor, if you do not believe European nations would have a right to demand it if we admit Spain to be a friendly power?

If we go admitting Spain to be our friend, admitting she is the sovereign government of the island, and simply go as a pacifier, and when pacification has taken place we attempt to steal the territory, would not foreign nations that hold the obligations of Spain have a right in equity to say to us, "Before you take that territory you must make good the obligations of Spain based upon its demands?"

"Oh," but you say, "we do not intend to take it ourselves." If we attempt to take it from Spain and give it to somebody else, it would be just the same as if we took it ourselves. If we attempt to deprive the Spanish Government of their land, admitting her to be a friendly power, it matters not whether we take the terri-

tory ourselves or take it and turn it over to somebody else. Hero lies the danger, and I shall miss my guess if this thing does not rise up to plague us.

Mr. LOVE. But suppose we recognize their independence?

Mr. GREENE. I am coming to that.

Mr. SMITH of Kentucky. Do you believe the other nations of the world would permit us to take the territory, if it is a friendly power?

Mr. GREENE. That is what I say; they would not. We are to intervene, and when that is accomplished—we attempt to seize this territory either for ourselves or to turn it over to the Cubans—the foreign powers will be to the front, the citizens of which hold the Spanish bonds, saying you must do one of two things; you must either guarantee the payment of those bonds yourselves or you must slip the government that you are going to establish in Cuba under them and have her assume them. There is where we are going. You have noticed all along that two words continually crop out in this whole Cuban matter. One is "buy" and the other is "bonds."

Mr. MAHON. We are not going to take Spain.

Mr. GREENE. Of course you are not; but if you take Spanish territory and thereby deprive her of it, that makes the obligation to foreign nations a matter of contention. These nations will tell you that before you can take the territory of Spain and deprive her of the power to meet her obligations, you must in some way make the obligations good. That is what they hope and what they believe. You know the power behind the throne as well as I know it.

They tell us we are going to organize a government there or allow the Cubans to organize one themselves. Now, follow me along. Suppose we say that foreign powers would not step in and compel us to assume the Cuban bonds or slip the Cuban government under them. Then what? We are going to have a government by Cuba in which, as the gentleman remarked the other day, that only the people of Cuba shall participate in. Do you not know that the towns and cities on the Island of Cuba are Spanish? They are loyal to the Spanish Crown.

Now, we are going to have an election and we are going to let all
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the people vote in the towns and cities and country. The Cuban people throughout the rural districts know nothing about popular government. The bondholders of Spain will be at that election and control it. You all know something about the power of money in a popular election. Do you not know what would happen in that election in Cuba when the power of Spanish bondholders was brought to bear upon it with the influence of Spanish subjects and Spanish sympathizers.

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentleman from Nebraska has expired.

Mr. GREENE. Mr. Chairman, I would like a little more time—say half an hour.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Nebraska asks to have his time extended one-half hour.

Mr. MAHON. I ask, Mr. Chairman, unanimous consent that his time be extended half an hour.

Mr. GREENE. I shall not occupy all that time.

Mr. JENKINS. I would like to know how much time the gentleman will occupy?

Mr. GREENE. I ask that my time be extended twenty-five minutes, and I may not occupy over twenty.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the gentleman's time, being extended twenty-five minutes? The Chair hears none.

Mr. GREENE. As I was saying, Mr. Chairman, such an election would be controlled by the Spanish sympathizers and the holders of Spanish bonds. Nobody doubts for a single moment but what the moneyed interests of America would also take part in that election, and that they would elect a government that would voluntarily slip the people of that island under the bonds of the mother country. So that all the way through it, I do not care on what side you look, I do not care on what corner you may approach it, you will find all along bonds! bonds! bonds!

Everywhere Spanish bonds, like Banquo's ghost, serenely present themselves for settlement. I want to say to you that is what there is in the question of peaceful intervention, and nothing more.

But the President says we ought to turn the whole question over to him. In the first place, gentlemen, the power to declare

war is granted to Congress. I have very grave doubts whether we can delegate that granted power if we wanted to do so. I am willing to assert my fixed belief that Congress has no authority to delegate any such power to the President of the United States, no matter how much or how little confidence we may have in him.

Mr. McCLEARY. Does the gentleman say that the power to conclude peace is vested in Congress?

Mr. GREENE. The power to declare war. Now, then, not only in my judgment have we no right to delegate this power, but it strikes me the proposition that we should do so is the most marvelous ever presented by a President of the United States to the American Congress. What might it mean? In view of the past, we can all tell what it might mean.

Why, sir, we could have war to-day and peace to-morrow; hot to-day and cold to-morrow; rain to-day and drought to-morrow. The fellows on the inside, knowing just when the cold was going to be blown and when the hot—oh, what a time they would have on Wall street! Just imagine! Now, I am not on the inside.

Mr. FISCHER. That is not your ground of complaint, is it?
[Laughter.]

Mr. GREENE. No; but the history of the recent past makes it all-important that no such power should be lodged in the President.

We can all understand what might happen in such a contingency. It is dangerous to turn over to the President or any one else a power that can keep this great nation of ours in a perturbed condition for six or twelve months at his own pleasure. What we want is to have this Cuban question settled. We want it settled now. We want it settled so that the American people may know what to depend upon. I agree with you Republicans, we want to have a wave of prosperity sweep over the country—we do not want to have it retarded or disturbed by this blowing hot and cold that we have had for the past few weeks. This is a good thing, perhaps, for HANNA and some other people; but we do not want a continuation of it. We want this thing settled; we have the power as the representatives of the people to stop it, and to stop it effectually.

Mr. BRUCKER. How do you propose to stop it?

Mr. GREENE. I am coming to that point. The way to stop it, and the only safe way, in my judgment, is, in the first place, to acknowledge the independence of the established Cuban Republic. [Applause on the Democratic side.] When you have acknowledged the independence of the Cuban Republic, you have said that Spain has already lost the island. We do not have to take it from her; she has lost it, and has lost it by the arms of the Cuban patriots.

Ah! but it is said they have no government over there. The President thinks they have no government. But every gentleman on this floor who is conversant with the facts knows it to be true that they have a government. The Cuban Republic has control to-day of two-thirds of the Island of Cuba. It has control, in fact, of the whole island outside of a few fortified towns and cities. It has a postal system that is said to be better than that of Spain herself. The mails are regularly distributed over the island, bearing postage stamps issued by the Cuban Republic. It has an army of 30,000 well-armed and well-equipped soldiers. It has a system of levying and collecting taxes. Under the system which has been inaugurated it has collected more than \$400,000. Yet it is said they have no government over there that we can recognize!

Other gentleman say, "It will not do to recognize Cuban independence, because they have issued a lot of bonds." Why, sir, on the floor of this House the other day my distinguished friend from Ohio, General GROSVENOR, unblushingly declared that the Cuban Republic had issued and scattered \$400,000,000 of bonds. Hence, he argued, we can not afford to acknowledge the Cuban Republic, because that would bind them to the payment of those bonds.

Mr. BRUCKER. No one took him seriously.

Mr. GREENE. But the very next day the deputy treasurer of the Cuban Republic went before the Senate committee and swore, and by his books proved, that they had issued only \$1,000,000 in bonds and had sold only \$120,000 of such bonds. That was a wide margin between the statement of the gentleman from Ohio and the facts. Only a difference between \$400,000,000 and \$120,000!

A MEMBER. And those had been taken by their own people.

Mr. GREENE. And some by ours. But suppose that they have issued bonds. It strikes me that a little over a year ago I heard

a great deal said in this country about "repudiation" and "repudiationists." I heard a great deal said about men wanting to scale down the debts of the country, and you can not imagine my surprise when my venerable friend from Ohio stood up and blatantly and brazenly, in the Halls of Congress, said that he wanted to devise some kind of a scheme to make the Cuban Republic repudiate its bonds.

Let me say to you, gentlemen, I am in favor of paying every debt this Government owes. I am in favor of the Cuban Republic paying every debt that it owes. I am not a repudiationist. I believe in paying every dollar that this or any other country owes, according to the exact letter of the contract that was made with the payees of the obligations.

Is there a man here who wants to arrange some kind of a trick for preventing the Cubans paying their honest debts—debts contracted in securing their freedom? American citizens, Mr. Chairman, have loaned them money to carry on this unequal warfare that they have sustained so long with the Spanish Government.

That money has been expended in buying bread for their starving families and guns and ammunition with which to shoot down the cruel and inhuman oppressors sent over from Spain. And now does the gentleman from Ohio, or any man, say that these American citizens who were kind enough to loan money to these people to help them fight their battles ought not to be paid? Is there a man on this floor so dishonest as to advocate the repudiation of the debt thus honestly created—a debt due to American citizens?

Why, Mr. Chairman, I can not believe such a thing to be true, and must treat this statement as a mere joke. If we acknowledge the independence of Cuba, there could be no question of the liability of the United States for taking it away from Spain. We would not then take it from Spain; but we say to the Cubans that they have fairly and legitimately, in the judgment of this country, won their freedom and are entitled to independence. I am, sir, not only in favor of acknowledging their independence, but in favor of following up that acknowledgment with a declaration of war against the Kingdom of Spain. [Applause.]

But you say there is no cause for war with Spain. Ever since

that lamentable and fatal night of February 15 last we have had just and proper cause for war with that Government. Turn your eyes to the harbor of Havana, and behold the scene of an American battle ship, peacefully slumbering in what we had reason to believe was a friendly harbor. But was it a friendly harbor? Look now at the wreck that is left. Two hundred and sixty-six brave American seamen, in the twinkling of an eye, were sent to meet their God, by a villainous Spanish mine, touched off by the hands of a murderous Spaniard.

But some may say "We do not know that they had anything to do with it." Mr. Chairman, nobody thinks that private citizens in Cuba are carrying around mines of this character in their pockets. Nobody believes that a Spanish private citizen is laying mines in Havana Harbor. Does any man here believe that a private citizen could have been able to understand the complicated connections of the mine with the mainland, so as to have enabled him to touch it off without the knowledge and consent of the Spanish authorities there?

That in itself was a cause of war; and that cause exists to-day. It has not been relieved or removed by anything that has occurred since, and until there shall be a full and complete settlement with Spain, not only for the destruction of our war ship, but for the murder of our American seamen, that will always remain a cause of war, and no other settlement, unless it be adequate, full, and complete, will ever satisfy the American public. [Applause.] You may patch it up if you will; you may try to plaster it over as you will; but I tell you that the blood of these men will cry up from the harbor of Havana until vengeance shall have been meted out by the hands of American soldiers.

Do you want to fix it any other way? Can you fix it any other way? If you declare war with Spain and acknowledge the independence of Cuba, we can fight Spain on the Island of Cuba, in Puerto Rico, in the Philippine Islands, and under the dome of her own capitol. And, Mr. Chairman, the American heart is ready and fired for the ordeal of battle whenever it shall come.

You say this is jingoism. Mr. Chairman, I would rather be called a jingo than a Dongo. I would greatly prefer to be called a jingoist than to be found apologizing for the atrocious and mer-

ciless action of the Spanish Government. [Applause.] Call it therefore what you will. The American people will respond to the cause of justice and right.

The American people are ready to fight, and they want to fight. Our ships are flogging at their moorings now, ready to avenge their dead sister ship. Our brave soldiers ask but for an opportunity to be permitted to avenge their dead comrades, some of whom still sleep in the sunken ship. What, then, are we to do? Patch it up?

Mr. Chairman, I desire to occupy but a moment further of time. I repeat what I have said. This country is ready now for the conflict. If we take that position, we do not make the Cubans our enemies and we do not become theirs. If we must meet Spain, while we bombard her forts in front, if Gomez can fight her in the rear we have no objection in the world to it. Gentlemen, the time is here when we must do something, and do something that has a meaning.

We can not afford to do less than that. I said I could only hope politically that you would not, for there will not be enough of you here next year to call the yeas and nays if you do not. You know that as well as I do. It is not news to you. But, I repeat, it has with me passed out of the realm of politics. I want to ask you, Republicans on this side and Democrats on that side, let us as American citizens and as representatives of a great country meet this crisis and meet it now. [Applause.]

We can not afford to do otherwise. I believe that on both sides of the Chamber there are true, loyal hearts that will follow that old flag wherever it goes and follow it to victory. I believe you are just as unwilling to see its stars and stripes sullied as I am. As a common people, as patriotic citizens, laying aside our parties and our prejudices, I want to appeal to you in the name of my country, in the name of our murdered dead, and in the name of God, let us vindicate American honor and the American flag.

[Applause.]

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